



Dear Friend,

Somebody Said I Was on Vacation

Let me confess right up front. I've not always had the discipline to honor my vacations. Now, I've gotten better over the years. But, there were times when I downright blew it!

Take, for instance, the trip to South Carolina years ago when my son was a toddler. Although my mom and I left spouses at home to check on an aging aunt (so, you *already* know it wasn't going to be all rest and relaxation), we were headed South. The trip held promises of a slower pace; of rocking on the porch and waving at passing cars, whether we knew the drivers or not; of reconnecting with one another, with my aunt, and with this new little person in all of our lives; and of a break from the madness of it all. Well, that was the plan anyway.

Instead (and with very good excuses), I packed my job for the trip as surely as I'd packed clothes and baby stuff. You see, at the time, I was the new kid on the block and also unexpectedly flying solo at the helm of an organization -- a leadership role that was meant for two. It was early in my management career; so, I still thought that the sign of my value was the number of times each day that staff members brought me their issues or questions or needs. And, to complicate matters even more, not only was I rolling out a new performance review system for the office, but I had reviews to write for each of my direct reports. All of that went on vacation with me (ugh!).

Needless to say, it was not much of a vacation...for me, for my loved ones, or quite honestly for my staff once I got back to work just as cranky and tired as before I left. (And, if my mother's reading this edition, I know she's talking back to her computer right about now.)

So, as we enter "vacation season 2011," let me ask you a question. How will you spend *your* vacation?

This month's *EA Insights* explores some of the reasons why you might just want to leave the job behind when you head out for your summer jaunt. Trust me. It'll do you, and everyone else, some good!

All the best,

June

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Will You Fall into the Vacation Trap?

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Memorial Day is now behind us, ushering in that time of year...summer!

Kids are, or soon will be, out of school. Co-workers start disappearing earlier, especially on Fridays. And, the folks who *are* around seem to be a bit more distracted than usual, as they do their final planning for (or just dream of) time away.

Vacation...leave...holiday, call it what you will. The question is whether (and, if so, how) you will use that time off you've earned.

I've seen a pattern over the years and, unfortunately, I've even fallen into the trap myself now and then. That is, leaving the office for vacation only to have phone calls, and now emails and text messages, interrupting you not just once a day, but throughout the day. Or, spending what's supposed to be vacation time to knock out a heavy project that couldn't be completed in the office. Now, I know that occasionally stuff happens. However, for some, this stuff happens all the time! Interruptions are so frequent, or work is so all-consuming, that families become perturbed, rest gets pushed aside, vacation is wasted, and you return to work more burned out than ever.

What's the lure of the trap?

Think about that question for a moment. Why do you spend the money to go to some vacation spot, or even if you remain local, why do you use valuable leave time, only to WORK? When you actually think about it, something's off there, isn't it?

Although not an exhaustive list, here are some possible reasons why that might happen.

Sometimes you need to be needed. One reason some of us allow the interruptions or permit the project to take over is because there's a misguided notion that this is what it takes to be needed. If you're not constantly pushing...proving...responding, somebody might just figure out that things function just fine (thank you) without you. And, who wants that? So, although you're supposed to be away, you become a constant fixture...just to be safe.

Sometimes you're just going through the motions. Okay, this reason is a

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"Quotes"

"If you're buying a complete vacation for \$2,000 or \$3,000, it's an investment you want to protect."

~Pauline Frommer

"In the position of president it has been impossible to take any substantial vacation, ... And I'm tired."

~Katherine Henderson

"No man needs a vacation so much as the man who has just had one."

~Elbert Hubbard

"If some people didn't tell you, you'd never know they'd been away on a vacation"

~Kin Hubbard

"Everybody wants to get away and feel like they're on vacation, even if it's just for the night at home when you can't go anywhere."

~Paula Jenkins

"A vacation is having nothing to do and all day to do it in."

~Robert Orben

"I'm going to go away on vacation, I'm going to try to get away from the phone, away from scripts. I think it's important to sit back and think about what you want."

little less business related and a little more personal in nature. (Bear with me for a minute.) Some of us divide our attention because we've got some unresolved issues at home or in our private lives. So, taking the obligatory time away gives you the ability to check a box for what you have done but, because of the work that comes along, you don't have to fully engage or become vulnerable and really handle that personal business that needs to be addressed. (Okay, I'm done.)

Sometimes you've created, or gravitated to, cultures that don't value time away. When I was a young lawyer, there was this unstated rule of having to put in "face time." That was spending evening or weekend time in the office so that you could be seen, whether or not you had time-sensitive work to accomplish. How many of us have created or bought into similar cultures? It's the notion that one can only truly demonstrate his or her commitment to the organization, or recognition of the seriousness of the work, if willing to sacrifice. And, in this instance, the sacrificial lamb is some bona fide time off.

Sometimes you haven't prepared people at work to function when you're not. Do you ever feel that there's NO WAY you can really take vacation because the place would fall apart if you were out of touch for more than a few hours? If that's the case, then as a leader or as a staff member, you haven't done your job! That sentiment reveals that, as a leader, you haven't invested the ongoing time into hiring and preparing people to carry on without you. As a staff member, it means that you haven't adequately organized and/or briefed those you've left behind to handle the routine matters that would arise on most summer days. (Yeah, they can call you if it's *truly* an emergency. But how often are the interruptions *truly* emergencies?)

Why are vacations not optional?

You need rest and care. What would happen to your car if you just drove it and drove it and drove it without a break and without proper maintenance? Well, liken yourself to that wonderful machine. You too need occasional rest, and refueling, and proper maintenance to be that well-oiled instrument you were meant to be. If you neglect doing so, you too could find yourself stuck on the shoulder of the road as everyone else zips by!



You need balance. Amazingly, you're not a one-dimensional person. You have various sides to your life, and work is just one piece of the puzzle that makes you...you. Vacations, or breaks in general, give you the opportunity to reconnect with aspects of yourself that may be temporarily sidelined in order to attend to a specific responsibility or goal. However, by ignoring those refreshing activities, things, or people for an inordinate amount of time, you inhibit your ability to function and create and interact effectively with others -- all of which are critical to you as a person and as a professional.

You need to be a role model. Especially if you're a supervisor or a senior staff member, understand that others are watching, and often modeling, your behavior. Accordingly, if you devalue vacations by your words or actions, yes, you may be nurturing an environment of results. More likely, though, you're fostering an unhealthy atmosphere where people are becoming burned out, bitter, and really bad ambassadors of the organization you represent.

You need to commit to motivating others. Believe it or not, occasionally stepping away, gives others room to grow. When you're always in place with a ready answer or instruction, some of the folks around you actually become less motivated to exhibit initiative and to take responsibility. On the other hand, when you plan, prepare folks for, and actually take your time away, then they have a chance to shine, to grow, and to thrive. Ultimately, that makes it easier for you and more beneficial for your organization because you develop a better equipped workforce and that allows you to share more of the load and focus on those tasks that really require your attention.

So, keep this in mind, and enjoy your vacation!

Managing Yourself and Your Time

Executive Advantage is proud to launch its "Straight Talk!" video series with this session on *Managing Yourself and Your Time*.



Not getting done what you need or want to?
Watch this session for some tips!

~Parker Stevenson

"A vacation should be just long enough that your boss misses you, and not long enough for him to discover how well he can get along without you."

~Unknown

"Vacation used to be a luxury; however, in today's world, it has become a necessity."

~Unknown

"It's important to learn what works for you so at the end of the vacation you really do feel like you had a break from your work."

~Mark Walker

"The link between stress and vacation levels is interesting. Do the results mean that executives who take longer vacations feel less stressed? Or is it that the less stressed they feel, the more vacation they are able to take? Either way, the differences in holiday patterns around the world are huge...."

~Peter Walker

"A vacation is what you take when you can no longer take what you've been taking."

~Earl Wilson

"Babies don't need a vacation, but I still see them at the beach.... [I]t pisses me off[.] I'll go over to a little baby and say, 'What are you doing here? You haven't worked a day in your life.'"

~Steven Wright

"On vacation, I totally unplug. I don't bring a laptop with me."

~Will Wright

About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about **Executive Advantage**, contact us [online](#) or at (301) 280-5950.

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